



# Spotlight on Spoonbills in Florida Bay

Cheva Heck, Public Information Officer

Once hunted close to extinction for their feathers and meat, roseate spoonbill populations began to recover by the mid-1930s, ultimately reaching half their previous numbers in Florida Bay. Now, these beautiful pink birds face new threats from development, water management practices and tourism.

The Audubon Society's Dr. Jerry Lorenz has extensively studied roseate spoonbill populations in Florida Bay. Spoonbills hunt small fish by touch, a method called tactile location. They depend on brackish, shallow waters for feeding and quiet mangrove islands for nesting and roosting.

Lorenz believes that water management practices have altered natural wet and dry cycles, disrupting the spoonbills' ability to find food. Because the young require a huge amount of food, shortages during nesting seriously impair population growth. Direct destruction of mangrove wetlands and repeated disturbances by improperly conducted "ecotours" worsen the species' plight.

Viewers can learn more in the latest "Species Spotlight", a new feature on the television show Waterways. Each "Species Spotlight" profiles a unique animal or plant found in South Florida. Past segments have profiled three-spot damselfish and hogfish.

Waterways is presented by the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, Everglades National Park and the Environmental Protection Agency and produced by Erik Hutchins of Keys Digital Video Productions. The show profiles aspects of the South Florida environment, including research and efforts to protect and restore the fragile ecosystem.

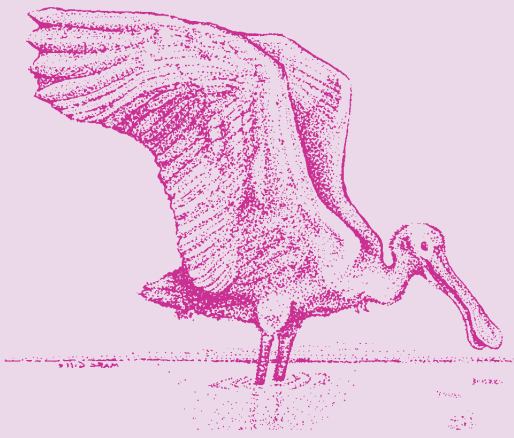
The show airs in Monroe County on AT&T Channel 19, in Miami-Dade on public television station WLRN's Channel 36 and on public access stations throughout Florida.



Photo: Erik Hutchins

**Roseate Spoonbills nest and roost in mangrove trees.**

## Facts about Roseate Spoonbills



\* The roseate spoonbill is the only spoonbill native to the Western Hemisphere. They are found along the Gulf coast of Texas, Louisiana, southern Florida, along both coasts of Central America, throughout the Greater Antilles, and in South America.

\*Roseate spoonbills feed in shallow marine, brackish, or freshwater sites, including tidal ponds, mudflats, freshwater sloughs and marshes. They consume small fish, prawns, crayfish, fiddler crabs, insects, and sometimes vegetative matter.

\*Prior to selecting a mate, spoonbills sometimes engage in "Up Flights". This behavior occurs when a small flock of spoonbills rises up together in flight, circles for a short distance, and then lands. Spoonbills may also be observed "sky gazing", pointing their bills skyward, when another spoonbill flies overhead.

*Note: This article appeared in the Fall 2002 issue of the newsletter of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, **Sounding Line**. For more information, visit: [floridakeys.noaa.gov](http://floridakeys.noaa.gov).*